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FOCUS

NEWSLETTER FOR THE OFFICE FOR THE PREVENTION OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

Immigrant Women: Overcoming Abuse in a New Country

She came to Canada, well educated and from her country's elite. Soon after arriving, her husband began beating her.

She wanted to leave him. But he threatened: "If you leave me, you'll be deported." She decided to put up with the abuse until she obtained her permanent residence.

Besides, where could she go? She received a degree from her home country, but she can't speak English or French. Who would hire her? How would she live? If only someone could help. She can't tell people in her cultural community about her plans. The community would outcast her. They'd say she was a bad woman who ran around.

Finally she leaves for a shelter. But no one there can speak her native language. In broken English, she tries to tell them what happened. The workers don't understand and try to guess what she is saying. They talk about her as if she's not there. She feels so alone.

“When a woman comes to Canada, the struggle of dealing with abuse is compounded. Not only does she have to deal with the abuse, she has to adjust to and learn a new system in a new country,” says Ana-Maria Zuloaga, an immigrant from Chile who works as a counsellor for A Safe Place, a shelter for battered women and children in Sherwood Park.

Fear of deportation, lack of knowledge of the legal system, language, societal pressures and isolation are some of the obstacles immigrant women must surmount to break the cycle of violence.

“Language is one of the most important factors,” explains Shala Askari, Coordinator of the first phase of the Multicultural



Family Violence Prevention program at the YWCA in Calgary. “Without language, even the most educated person from another country cannot get a job. A woman with limited financial resources will tend to put up with an abusive situation for a lot longer.”

When a woman cannot speak English, the feeling of isolation can be overwhelming. It is one thing for an immigrant woman to learn where to go for help, but when people don't understand her, the problem compounds itself. Sometimes the helping organization has a misconception about other cultures which can lead to misunderstandings.

Community social pressures can be a great strain too. “Many immigrant women have

had it ingrained that it's shameful to leave their husbands. There's a real fear the community could retaliate,” says Zuloaga.

“One of the greatest sources of stress is misinformation. Often women don't know their rights or the legal system. The husband may threaten: If you don't obey me, I'll send you back to your homeland. In some cases this may be true,” explains Zuloaga. Foreign-born women who have been sponsored by their Canadian-born husbands may lose their immigration status if the marriage breaks down.

Although these obstacles may seem large, men and women from immigrant communities, agencies and organizations are teaming together to help newcomers in

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abusive situations.

One group began when a Latin American woman who worked at the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers in Edmonton was swamped by the number of women who would tell her about their histories of abuse.

"That's how the project 'Soledad' started. Soledad is Spanish for 'isolation' and 'loneliness'," says Zuloaga.

The grassroots project began in 1989 and was made up of a board of both Canadian-born and Latin American-born women. "The project took a lot of creativity. We decided to produce a film and brochure. In the video, three women talk about their histories of abuse. The film tells about resources, women's rights and the legal system," Zuloaga says.

She explains, "When service providers work with an immigrant, they have to make sure she has a full understanding of her legal rights in her own language. Workers must allow the immigrant to have exploratory time to assess her needs. There are many workers who do an excellent job in providing service to immigrants. However, they can better themselves by being immersed in the culture and knowing more than one language."

In Calgary, Shala Askari at the YWCA started a multicultural family violence program. The program, funded by the federal department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship, aims to get immigrant men to stop abusing their spouses.

"We're just completing the first phase of the program. This phase is basically a needs assessment of what services immi-

grants need and what factors and values cause abuse," says Askari.

Askari has identified 15 factors that contribute to abuse, including low self-esteem for both the abuser and the victim, isolation, stress, religious or societal support, division of labor and hierarchy.

"Some people may think the above factors would be different for Canadian-born and foreign-born people. They're really the same. But just because all 15 factors exist, does not mean a person will be abusive. The 'individual factor' is very important. Ultimately, the individual is responsible. Abuse will happen only if a person values these factors," remarks Askari.

"In phase one, we learned that most immigrant women want to stay in a relationship, but want the abuse to stop. So in the second phase, the YWCA, in collaboration with other immigrant agencies, will be working with families," Askari says.

Phase two is a pilot phase scheduled to begin as soon as funding is obtained. "The second phase addresses both individual and societal change," explains Askari. Individual change will occur through support groups and outreach services. "Because there's so much isolation among immigrant people, outreach services are desperately needed. Outreach workers go to homes to teach families who don't know the system," she adds.

Societal change will occur by increasing awareness among professionals who work with immigrants. "Because of the denial and secrecy among many immigrants, we need to increase awareness among people such as

immigration agency workers, doctors, and English as Second Language (ESL) teachers," explains Askari.

Nena Jovic-Andrejevic, Executive Director of Changing Together in Edmonton, is addressing family violence among immigrants by holding public education workshops. "These family violence workshops are given to those taking ESL courses. Many of the newcomers we teach are not aware of the initiatives taken by Canada to fight against family violence. They may not be aware of the different acts that protect children, women and the elderly," Jovic-Andrejevic says.

"Although most of the people we teach have not been abused, they go back to the community and tell what they've learned. There's a spill-over effect and the information reaches many people," she continues.

"We've also found there's a lack of resources in other languages, so we're translating family violence brochures into many languages," Jovic-Andrejevic explains.

Although women have taken the lead in family violence prevention programs, men are joining the ranks in increasing numbers. "We, as men, need to realize we're an intrinsic part of family violence as it relates to wives, lovers and children," says Leo Campos, Settlement/Outreach worker at Edmonton Immigrant Services Association.

Campos is helping to set up a Latin American men's group to help abusive men. "We're very much in the preliminary stages. We want men to learn a new way of being in a relationship," says Campos.

Many groups are introducing creative ways to increase awareness and reach out to immigrants suffering abuse. As awareness of immigrant issues increases among immigrant communities and agencies working with immigrants, we are seeing a change in perceptions. Only through continued interest and commitment on the part of government and community can immigrants find the help they need to overcome abuse in a new country.



D I D Y O U K N O W ?

“Brighter Futures,” a report released by National Health and Welfare, outlines a series of federal efforts on behalf of Canadian children. The report recognizes that of Canada's 6.6 million children, over one million are at risk because of poverty, ill health, unhealthy living conditions, neglect or abuse.

Contact: Publications Distribution Unit, Communications Branch, Health and Welfare Canada, Ottawa, K1A 0K9, (613) 952-9191, Fax (613) 952-7266.

A new project, **Caring Communities**, is designed to promote the prevention of child sexual abuse through initiatives at the community level. The project began in April 1992 and is expected to be completed by 1994. The final stage of Caring Communities will see the development of resource kits that will provide communities with information that has been proven effective. Contact: Marilyn Kuhn, Project Manager, Caring Communities, 55 Parkdale Avenue, Ottawa, K1Y 1E5, (613) 722-0133, Fax (613) 722-4829.

Liberty: A Manual for Group Facilitators and Survivors of Woman Abuse is available for those who want to conduct workshops to help women who have left abusive men. The publication was produced by the Family Services Association of Halifax, Dartmouth, Bedford and Halifax County, and the Mainland South Committee Against Woman Abuse. Contact: Family Services Association, 5614 Fenwick Street, Suite 106, Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3H 1P9, (902) 420-1980.

The Status of Women Council of the N.W.T. has produced a family violence kit called **“Break the Silence.”** These kits will be translated into Inuktitut syllabics. Funding for the project was provided by the Victim Assistance Fund of the Department of Justice, Government of the N.W.T. Contact: (403) 920-6177.

Ottawa police are using a new system to help prevent spousal abuse — a data base with a 24 hour-a-day information on court restraining orders. The system allows police to access information on a mobile data terminal before they arrive at the scene of dispute.

The **National Clearinghouse on Family Violence** has just completed its 10-year anniversary. The Clearinghouse, created in 1982, has a mandate to provide information and consultation relevant to the prevention and treatment of child abuse, child neglect, wife assault and elder abuse.

The **Kids Help Phone Bowlathon** raised \$395,000 in 1992. Over 200 communities participated across the country. The Bowlathon received about 60,000 pledges.

A handbook designed for battered women is available from the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women. **“Making Changes: A Book for Women in Abusive Relationships”** provides information about abuse, what women can do if they are in an abusive situation, and how to deal with legal, money and housing matters. Contact: Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Toll free 1-800-565-8662, Voice or TDD (902) 424-8662, Fax (902) 424-0573.

The **National Victims Resource Centre** acts as a national communication network for victims, victims services and governments that want to access information on victims of crime. The centre also provides information on family violence. Contact: Toll free 1-800-267-0454.

Family violence is one of the most pervasive problems affecting federal offenders. To enable **Correctional Service Canada (CSC)** staff to understand and respond to the problem, CSC is implementing a comprehensive national family violence awareness and training program this year.

Until the United Nations changes its definition of refugee status, federal **Immigration** will not change its policy to shelter women who fear abuse because of their sex. Canada follows United Nations requirements that says a person seeking refugee status must show a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, social group or political opinion. (Source: Canadian Press)

Northeast

During Family Violence Prevention Month last November, the County of St. Paul circulated an awareness insert to 7,000 homes in **St. Paul, Elk Point and Two Hills**. The eight-page insert included topics such as dating violence, neglect, sexual abuse, elder abuse and anger management.

Northwest

In November 1992, a panel discussion was held in **Grande Prairie** called "Let's Talk About It! Let's Go Beyond Talking to Ideas for Action." Panel members included Alberta Mental Health; Alberta Family and Social Services; Alberta Solicitor General; Alberta Attorney General; RCMP; and the Grande Prairie Committee on Family Violence.

Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) in **Falher** is holding childhood sexual abuse groups. The groups will run for 10 weeks. Women will be able to discuss anger, trust, disclosure, relationships and other topics, as well as learn to take responsibility for their lives and increase their coping skills.

Edmonton

To coincide with Family Violence Prevention Month, the **Edmonton** Council Against Family Violence printed a message on City of Edmonton utility bills. It read: "Family violence hurts everyone. Violence is being hurt physically, sexually or emotionally by anyone, any place, any time. If you are a victim or abuser, get help." Several phone numbers were included.

A City of **Edmonton** pilot project that helps women in abusive relationships, has been deemed a success and will continue. The pilot project, which teamed a police officer and social worker, reduced the number of times that police were called back to homes where there were ongoing domestic disputes.

The Fourth Annual Injury in Alberta Conference, held in **Edmonton** last October, presented a workshop on 'injuries as a result of violence.'

Central

The Azimuth Theatre performed "Under Broken Wings" in **Rocky Mountain House** last November. The play, through a series of vignettes, explores the cycle of child, sibling, dating, spousal and elder abuse.

Calgary

Over the next few months, **Calgary** Health Services (Village Square) will address violence issues through stories, visual art and drama productions.

In December, two YWCA workers from Zambia came to **Calgary** to learn more about domestic violence programs here. The two women are looking for options to provide more extensive services in a country where there are no shelters and no government assistance to support women and children fleeing abuse. The workers also visited outreach and support services on Alberta's native reserves because they feel native kinship relations are similar to those in Zambia. The visit was arranged by Fran Smith, Director of Family Violence Prevention Programs at the Calgary YWCA.

A special session was held in **Calgary** for immigrant women at a one-day workshop last November. The event was sponsored by Calgary Legal Guidance and the Calgary Status of Women Action Committee. It helped women understand their legal rights and responsibilities in marriage breakdown, especially when husbands are abusive.

South

The Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) board for the **Crowsnest Pass** area is working toward the purchase of an emergency van that would help battered women seeking shelter. The van will be used to drive women to a regional shelter to be located in Pincher Creek.

The Family Studies Program of **Lethbridge** Community College held a series of four family violence workshops, in cooperation with the Interagency Committee on the Prevention of Family Violence. The series included workshops on family violence intervention skills being used with native and non-native families; workshops on home visiting in prevention/intervention of family violence; and video presentations about sexual abuse, wife battering and date rape. The video presentations were held at the Lethbridge Public Library.

WORKING WITH IMMIGRANT WOMAN SURVIVORS OF WIFE ASSAULT

TOWARDS EQUAL ACCESS



A HANDBOOK FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS

Towards Equal Access — A Handbook for Service Providers

Publisher: Immigrant & Visible Minority Women Against Abuse, Ottawa, 1991. To order, contact: Education Wife Assault, 427 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1X7. Tel: (416) 968-3422.

Canada is a multicultural nation. The once predominant ethno-European cultural base of Canada has shifted to a society made up of a number of cultures. As with other Canadian provinces, Alberta is attempting to deal with the complex societal changes that are occurring because of this cultural shift.

Abuse toward women cannot be tolerated in any society. However, immigrant women coming to Canada face certain obstacles not experienced by Canadian-born women. This Ontario publication

outlines how language, customs and cultural differences are stumbling blocks for abused immigrant women seeking help.

The handbook provides information to service providers to begin bridging the gaps of awareness. It helps service providers better understand the fears and concerns of immigrant women.

“Towards Equal Access” brings out the challenges faced by service providers in crisis intervention, both in long-term and short-term situations, and deals with issues related to outreach initiatives with mainstream communities. The book identifies that **all** services cannot be geared to **all** women because of different cultural needs.

Community response has been great!

In 1992, for the second year, the Office for the Prevention of Family Violence developed materials for young people as the main focus for the Family Violence Prevention Month kit.

The “Talk It Out” campaign materials which were introduced in 1991 elicited a tremendous response from schools, community agencies, health units, victim’s service units and others. A follow-up telephone survey also indicated a very positive response and the Office was encouraged to continue with similar themes.

“Keep Talking” and “Let’s Talk About It” were the two new themes for the

1992 campaign kit. The kit included:

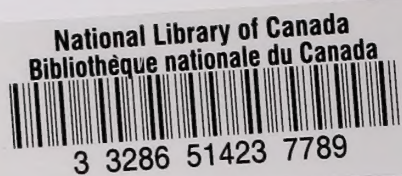
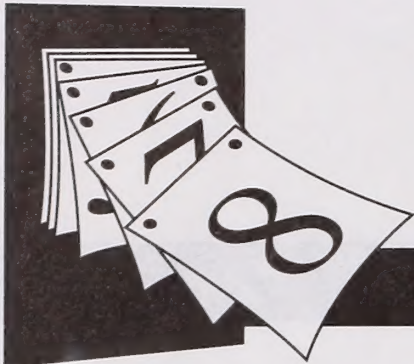
- a “Talk About It” brochure for young people on violence in the home
- a “Let’s Talk About It” poster displaying the Office’s logo
- a vibrant electrostatic logo sticker
- a “Keep Talking” pocket-sized telephone directory
- a bright, square-shaped “Keep Talking” button
- some new tips sheets for young people on self-esteem, dating violence, and on dealing with conflict and anger.

Over 4,500 kits were distributed in all. The initial mailout included schools, FCSS

offices, family violence agencies and organizations, health units, Native counselling services, Indian Bands and Metis Settlements, Native Friendship Centres, AADAC offices, Boys and Girls Clubs, Further Education Councils, and Young Offender Centres.

Feedback regarding the new materials has again been very positive. The Office mailed out over 320,000 items in September, October and November directly relating to the campaign.

For more information or for a copy of the new materials, please call Melanie or Barbara at 422-5916.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

March 28 to 31, 1993

Padova, Italy

**4TH EUROPEAN CONFERENCE ON CHILD ABUSE
AND NEGLECT**

Acting Upon European Strategies for Child Protection

Tel: (49) 651-699

Fax: (49) 651-320

April 29 to May 1, 1993

Winnipeg, Manitoba

SORROW AND STRENGTH: THE PROCESS

Contact: 1993 Coordinating Committee
160 Garfield Street South, Winnipeg, Manitoba
R3G 2L8
Tel: (204) 786-1971

April 29 to May 1, 1993

London, Ontario

**ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN:
MOVING INTO ACTION**

Tel: (519) 661-3631

May 6 to 7, 1993

Lethbridge, Alberta

**FETAL ALCOHOL SYNDROME AND FETAL ALCOHOL
EFFECTS**

Contact: Dave Yawney
Tel: (403) 320-9040

May 27 to 30, 1993

Vancouver, British Columbia

**ENGENDERING CHANGE: QUESTIONS OF POWER IN
FAMILY PRACTICE**

17th Western Canadian Conference on Family Practice

Tel: (604) 822-2576

August 9 to 11, 1993

Chicago, Illinois

BEING THERE FOR THE CHANGE

(Seventh Annual Conference of the Foster Family-based Treatment Association)

Contact: Vicki Yaney
Tel: (419) 695-8010

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OF FAMILY VIOLENCE
ALBERTA FAMILY AND SOCIAL SERVICES
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